

Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire Are One Thing -- A Christmas Tree is Another

California Department of Consumer Affairs Urges Fire-Safety Steps to Prevent Holiday Tragedy

On average, one in every 22 reported home Christmas tree fires result in death, according to the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA).

With that tragic, but preventable statistic in mind, California Department of Consumer Affairs Director Charlene Zettel strongly encouraged those purchasing and displaying Christmas trees to keep safety in mind.

"We want all Californians to be fire safe during the holidays," said Zettel. "Carefully decorating Christmas trees and taking other simple precautions can keep your holidays bright."

Christmas tree safety begins at the sales lot, according to Capt. Jeff Lynch, public information officer, Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District. "Tap any potential purchase on the ground before you buy. If you tap the tree and it drops needles, it is already too dry. Look for another tree that passes the 'tap test'."

Debra Ann Kayden RN, burn outreach coordinator, UC Davis Regional Burn Center, suggested: "Prevention first. When selecting your tree, check the needles. Needles should be green, should bend and not break when you fold a needle in half, and should be hard to pull off the branches."

Chief Brian Stiger of the Department of Consumer Affairs' Bureau of Home Furnishings and Thermal Insulation (BHFTI) emphasized, "Using Underwriters Laboratory or UL-approved decorations and accessories is a safe way to be festive."

To prevent a Christmas tree fire in the home, Zettel urged consumers to review the following safety tips, recommended by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, BHFTI and the NFPA.

Dry Trees:

- Safely dispose of the tree when it begins dropping needles.
- Dried-out trees are highly flammable and should not be left in a house or garage, or placed against the house.
- Make sure the tree is at least three feet (one meter) away from any heat source, such as fireplaces and radiators.
- Try to position the tree near an outlet so that cords are not running long distances.
- Do not place the tree where it may block exits.



FIRE SAFETY TIPS

- ▶ Check needles to avoid dry trees
- ▶ Water tree frequently
- ▶ Use caution with lights, candles

Moist Trees:

- Once you get your tree home, remember that a six-foot tree will use one gallon of water every two days.
- The stand should hold at least one gallon of water and needs to be checked daily.

Lights:

- Frayed and worn cords and decorations could be the source to a fire incident.
- Use Underwriters Laboratory-approved decorations and accessories.
- Check your strands of lights to determine the number of strands that may be connected.
- Connect no more than three strands of push-in bulbs and a maximum of 50 bulbs for screw-in bulbs.

Candles:

- Never use lit candles to decorate a tree.
- Place any candles well away from tree branches.
- Keep burning candles within sight.
- Always use non-flammable holders and keep them away from children and pets.
- Keep lighted candles away from decorations or other flammable items.
- Extinguish all candles before you go to bed or leave the house.

Additional Safety Tips:

- National Christmas Tree Association www.christmastree.org/care.cfm
- California Christmas Tree Association www.cachristmas.com/facts.html

The state association, known as CCTA, runs a Tree Fresh Certified Program to ensure consumers purchase the freshest possible Christmas tree. Association members promise to display cut Christmas trees in water and answer questions about their care.

According to the CCTA, the 'Tree Fresh Certified' stamp of approval guarantees consumers are purchasing the freshest possible tree. To find a fresh cut Christmas tree lot location in California:

- click on www.cachristmas.com/RetailLotMenu.html
- email califcta@aol.com
- or call 800-454-TREES / 209-669-6668

For more [holiday consumer tips](#), visit the California Department of Consumer Affairs Web site at www.consumer.ca.gov.

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